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SUBJECT: SLAPSHOT: HOCKEY STAR WITHDRAWS FROM HALL OF FAME

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Keith Eddins, for reasons 1.4 b /d.

¶1. (C) Introduction and Summary: Last December, former Slovak Ambassador to the U.S. Martin Butora declined to accept an award from the Slovak Atlantic Commission because Interior Minister Kalinak was a co-awardee. Butora cited Kalinak's role in a government that systematically devalues civic society while tolerating cronyism and corruption. Bratislava's intellectual elite took notice, but virtually no one else did. However, the recent decision by Slovak hockey great Peter Stastny to withdraw from the Slovak Hockey Hall of Fame may resonate more broadly with the hockey-mad Slovak public. Stastny cited the leading role Juraj Siroky, a former StB agent and current sponsor of Smer (Prime Minister Fico's party), plays in the Slovak Hockey Association. We have recently been taking a closer look at Siroky, one of Slovakia's wealthiest and best-connected businessman, because he may prove a good test case for implementation of Presidential Proclamation 7750. End Introduction and Summary.

¶2. (C) Slovak MEP and former NHL great Peter Stastny (SDKU) recently announced his resignation from the Slovak Hockey Hall of Fame. He insisted that all of his exhibits (pictures, jerseys, awards) be removed from display in the main Bratislava ice arena. Stastny explained the move as the latest step in his ongoing protest against former StB agent turned tycoon Juraj Siroky. Siroky has served as the Chairman of the Slovak National Hockey Association since 1998 and is also a co-owner of the Bratislava hockey team, HC Slovan.

¶3. (C) Stastny asserts that Siroky's service as a high-ranking Communist-era intelligence official alone should disqualify him from a high position in the Slovak hockey firmament. (Siroky served in the StB for almost twenty years, including at the Czechoslovak Embassy in Washington in the mid-1980's.) In his press release, Stastny also alludes to Siroky's allegedly ill-gotten wealth. Siroky was a partner in the infamous "Harvard Funds," a money management company that became one of the most successful -- to the use the term loosely -- investment funds participating in the voucher privatization process in the Czech and Slovak Republics in the early 1990s. The tale of Harvard's arc and fall is complex, but suffice it to say that investigations into criminal wrongdoing on the part of the funds' managers continue, and one of them has already served jail time. Siroky has always maintained his innocence, but his ex-partner claims he was involved in embezzlement and money laundering.

¶4. (C) According to Stastny, Siroky has also stripped assets from the hockey association: "He borrows money for free, but when the Association does not have money, he lends it at 24 percent interest." Stastny has also called attention to the fact that Siroky's Vahostav construction company, in what would appear to be a clear conflict of interest, is

apparently involved in the reconstruction of the Bratislava ice arena prior to the 2011 Ice Hockey World Championships. Stastny concludes his statement with the admonition that a society that ignores its past has no future.

15. (C) Prior to Stastny's announcement, Siroky -- who has a valid U.S. non-immigrant visa -- had already been on our radar for several reasons. He is a well known, if discreet, sponsor of Prime Minister Fico's party Smer. He is alleged to have dictated key ministerial posts and has certainly received a number of lucrative state contracts -- often awarded under non-transparent circumstances -- by virtue of his ties to Smer (particularly his relationships with Fico, President Gasparovic, Minister of Transport Vazny, and Minister of Economy Jahnatek). Because of Siroky's StB background, ties to questionable figures such as former SIS chief Ivan Lexa, reasonable suspicions about the origin of his wealth, and his ongoing, non-transparent business practices and associations, we have been reviewing the law to determine whether he might prove to be a solid test case for implementation of Presidential Proclamation 7750. We expect to make a final recommendation soon.

16. (C) Embassy Comment: We have our doubts as to whether Stastny's "cri de coeur" will have any immediate or significant impact; Siroky is too well connected to be felled by a single slapshot from a retired hockey star. Because of Stastny's position in the European Parliament and his affiliation with the SDKU, his protests will be dismissed by many as simply another opposition attack against Smer and the Fico government. Nevertheless, Stastny's withdrawal from the Hall of Fame has received more significant media coverage

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than, for example, Butura's public protest. And the fact that Stastny's jersey, trophies, and other memorabilia are being removed from Bratislava's main hockey venue may just provoke some raised eyebrows and even a few questions about the role Juraj Siroky plays in Slovak hockey, not to mention in Slovak society.
EDDINS